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AN AFTER-GLANCE AT THE VISIT OF THE AMERICAN FLEET TO AUSTRALIA.

BY THE RT. HON. GEORGE HOUSTON REID.

THE Australian continent is divided from all other continents by a vast expanse of ocean. When the white man came, he found the aborigines in possession feeble alike in numbers and in spirit. There were few forests and no impenetrable jungles. Even the wild animals were harmless. The only serious troubles which faced the Australian pioneer were two: the problem of water-supply and his remoteness from civilization.

In the inevitable struggless between the black possessors and the white intruders, little blood was shed and comparatively few lives were lost. The first and only flag of a foreign country whose staff was ever planted in the soil of this great island, of three million square miles, was the British flag, raised by Captain Cook, when he landed in Botany Bay, near Sydney, from His Majesty's ship "Endeavor," in 1770. There were, therefore, no complications arising from rival white settlements. Nor has any hostile demonstration ever been aimed at these shores.

This brief recital shows how free from difficulty, danger or disorder the path of enterprise in Australia has been. The contrast between American and Australian history in that respect is immense. English, French and Spanish pioneers in America had to fight, first, for every inch of ground and footing they gained against men of marvellous ferocity, cunning, tenacity and cruelty. The struggle went on every day and every year, from the Gulf to the St. Lawrence, from New England to the Far West. Then, too, unlike Australia, with its vast open spaces, North America opposed to the settler not only powerful native enemies, of consummate heroism and craft, but also giant forests which screened the red men and ambushed the white. The

alternatives before the white men were a life of incessant hardship and toil if they were fortunate, and a cruel death for themselves and perils worse than death for their wives and daughters if they were not. And when the reflective observer studies the fabulous growth of the United States in these latter days, and admires the immense prospect of smiling harvests and magnificent cities which are the wonder of the world, his mind cannot help glancing back to the seed-time of all these marvels, to the men of the axe and the rifle, and their women and children, scattered through frontier settlements, surrounded by hosts of relentless foes. No stately monuments mark the places where the dust of the American backwoodsmen is reposing—for them there is no Westminster Abbey; yet, in sober truth, they are amongst the greatest heroes and benefactors of mankind, and their memory was and is of far greater value to America than all the wealth of Wall Street. On the other hand, with so few dangers to overcome, so few enemies to subdue, it is not strange that Australia's progress has been rapid, or that the Australian people are prosperous and happy.

Although our population is under 4,200,000, fifteen million tons of shipping enter our ports every year. Our total foreign trade is three hundred and fifty million dollars—about eighty-five dollars a head. There are one million, two hundred and sixty thousand depositors in our savings-banks, with two hundred and ten million dollars to their credit. Too much cannot be said of the lot of the Australian people in point of actual comfort and enjoyment of the possibilities of life. But this happy condition is not the result of any profound political sagacity. It is explained by the simple fact that in Australia the Anglo-Saxon has had Nature working for him more fully than anywhere else.

We have seven parliaments—one Federal and six State legislatures—each with two separate houses. We have vote by ballot, and adult suffrage is almost universal. Such an organization as a conservative party does not exist in Australia. The main difference between parties is that one party is sometimes more radical than the other. The most interesting novelties in Australia are the Labor Party and the laws respecting industrial disputes. The representatives of the Labor Party are subject to outside labor leagues and pledged to platforms adopted by these bodies. They must vote together on all the planks and

policies approved by these leagues. Without the long-standing distinctions of party and issue and principle which divide American partisans, there is yet much of strenuousness in Australian politics. The different elements of the newly federated States have not yet come sufficiently together to establish bases of settled policy, and the main divisions, at present, are along lines between labor and capital. Elections to the Federal Parliament are contested, as yet, largely upon the basis of local controversies. The seat of power rests in the majority of the popular branch of Parliament, and the Ministry is constituted to represent the majority in this body. A Ministry may fall simply as the result of the breaking up of existing combinations, without any general election to change the complexion of the body.

The labor laws cover two main systems—Wages Boards and Arbitration Courts. The Boards are formed of equal numbers of employed and employers, with a neutral chairman, and all of the decisions are final. The Courts have a Judge President, who has power to determine disputes and conditions and penalties. The employer and trades unions have power to arrive at agreements which can be registered and enforced. Preference to the unions can be given, in the courts, if the judge so decides. The Wages Boards do not discriminate between unionists and non-unionists, and so far the Wages Boards seem to create the least friction and to accomplish the best results; while the Courts seem to excite more trouble than ever before. When the awards suit the men, naturally there is no objection; but, when they do not, the whole machinery often seems ready to break down. It is too soon to speak positively on the matter, however. The stage of experiment is not passed. With a loyal acceptance of awards, on both sides, the system would work well; but without it—and that is too often the case—it becomes the perfection of strife, confusion and injustice.

The great task before Australia is to work out the harmony of union under peaceful conditions, which was wrought in the United States through the dire necessity of union for strength against outside assault. One of the fortunate and helpful incidents along this line was the visit of the American fleet.

Some censorious critics in America, I understand, assigned a warlike motive to the despatch of the battleships from Hampton Roads, but the event has become one of world-wide importance

for very different reasons. It has now been realized by every one that the display of naval power by the United States was in the interests of universal peace. Not so long ago, such a display would have meant a crisis of some kind, but one of the very best of the good things the modern world is getting accustomed to is the exhibition of force in the cause of peace and good will, and the American fleet did a great deal, in many ways, to increase the happiness and content of the nations.

Undoubtedly, it did as much for America as for other nations. The unprecedented voyage is a striking proof of the changed attitude of the United States toward international politics. The nation is no longer an idle spectator of foreign diplomacy. The strenuous life is no longer restricted to its own affairs. The American people are beginning to see that their commercial interests compel them, if nothing else would, to take part in the shaping of the world's destinies. This is a very good thing for the world at large. National jealousies and greed have been the greatest shadders of human blood, and they still cast ominous shadows. The United States cannot be jealous of any other nation; their own lot is too enviable. The United States cannot be greedy; they enjoy a share of the world's resources and prosperity which allows infinite room for magnificent development, but leaves none for morbid craving. The cause of universal harmony has everything to gain from the new line taken by the United States, the Great Republic, in becoming an active member of the family of Nations.

The President's acceptance of our invitation to send the fleet over to visit us was hailed with delight by all classes of the Australian people. It was a kindly recognition of the new Commonwealth. It was an admission, at once gracious and sagacious, that the greatest federation in the world and the youngest have a future on the Pacific which gravely concerns them both. The acceptance of the invitation meant even more than that. It made the good understanding which now happily prevails between the Imperial and the American Governments more conspicuous than it was before; for one cannot but realize that a very few years ago the project would have found many unfriendly minds on both sides of the Atlantic. Even now it was an experiment, and the enthusiasm of the welcomes showered upon the fleet in New Zealand, and again and again in Australia, evidently

created in the minds of the Admirals, the officers and men of the fleet, a feeling of pleased surprise. They could not realize till then the boundless cordiality of Australians when some one comes along whom they are delighted to honor.

The analysis of the overwhelming demonstrations which greeted the war vessels of the United States is not difficult. The people of Australia live at an immense distance from the imposing spectacles and gigantic realities of the older nations. Old-World storms have never seriously ruffled the placid surface of the antipodes. Few of us have been able to travel. Our own continent is not only remote, it is thinly settled and bare of great events. The intense strain of human need and the tremendous energy of human effort, which exhaust and sadden mankind in the Northern Hemisphere, have not yet made serious call on the exuberant spirits of Young Australia. Then we have the blood of sea-faring races in our veins. Of all the stirring sights that could be offered us, none could raise our interest and admiration to a higher pitch than the splendid fleet of modern battleships which America sent to visit us. As it came to anchor in each successive port, it realized our highest expectations. Terrible as the engines of destruction were, they excited no sensation of fear, but universal feelings of confidence and delight. They had steamed the longest and most brilliant voyage a fleet of modern battleships has ever made, and they did it as bearers of messages of peace and good will from the most populous white nation in the world to all the world. The decks of the sixteen monsters were cleared, but not for action—for hospitality and friendship.

Australians of every class and creed have been profoundly touched by this emphatic demonstration of the friendship and kinship of the United States. Even the War of Independence was not a war between the people of the Colonies and the people of Great Britain and Ireland. In those days wars were mainly sources of amusement and profit to the idle and privileged rich who instigated them. The British people never have declared and never will declare war against the American people. They were the first to perceive that the American colonists, in their triumph, won a glorious victory for *freedom, always and everywhere*. That a few unseasoned yeomen should overcome disciplined British armies so soon after Plassey and Quebec is one

of history's sublimest proofs of the power of a good cause. Only a few years later, when the vanquished oppressor assumed her rightful place and became the champion of the world's liberties, she easily overthrew the matchless power of Napoleon, whose veterans had trampled on all of the dynasties of Europe.

Through the visit of the fleet, the American and the Australian peoples have met really for the first time. The delusions of distance and ignorance and the caricatures of humor have been corrected by the reality of contact. The Admirals, officers and men earned unbounded admiration by their conduct on all occasions. The United States may well be proud of their representatives. Admiral Sperry's speeches were weighty, and his sentiments well chosen and happily expressed. He did the fullest justice to the Mother Country, the Empire and the British Navy, while our demonstrations of good feeling gave him no occasion to act as champion of his own country. There was no cloud hanging over the visit. Our own delight, as profoundly loyal subjects of King Edward, in honoring our American cousins, reflected the feeling of kinship which now dominates the relations between the two greatest powers the world has ever known. We rejoice in the growing friendship between Great Britain and the United States. Peace could have no better champions. Humanity could have no better allies. Their united power is the best guaranty the world has ever had of a new reign of justice, liberty and progress in all parts of the globe.

GEORGE HOUSTON REID.